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Theodore Roosevelt

An Appreciation

JOSEPH S. AUERBACH



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BY

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THEODORE ROOSEVELT

*Theodore Roosevelt**

A REPUBLICAN gathering like this, Mr. Chairman, may seem a strange resort for a Democrat; and yet if gregariously inclined, what other kind of political meeting can he frequent unless the coming election turns out to be a landslide for the once accredited party to which I belong. An incident of which I was an amused spectator prompts me, however, not to dwell unduly on the misfortunes of what some facetious soul has termed that late party.

At a dinner of the New York State Branch of the Ohio Society, shortly after the last Presidential election, among the speakers were a Senator of the United States and Mr. Job Hedges. The Senator had referred in rather lachrymose terms to the recent calamity visited upon the Democratic party, and, as illustrative of his sad estate, read an irrelevant verse or two from Deuteronomy. When Mr. Hedges' turn came to speak, he announced his failure to understand the appropriateness of the Scriptural reference; and wondered, why if any Bible book must be quoted from on

* Address at the Annual Dinner of the Nassau County Republican Club, October 27, 1922.

such an occasion, Exodus was not to be preferred to Deuteronomy!

Nevertheless, considering the fact that your meeting is primarily in commemoration of the birthday of Theodore Roosevelt, let me not regard myself as a Democrat among Republicans, but, according to the felicitous phrase of your Chairman, as a neighbor among neighbors, paying tribute to one of the commanding personalities in American life.

At the outset, however, let me say that I do not entertain views which, at times, seem to be required of one who presents himself as a so-called Roosevelt man. I am not here to indulge in adulation of him, since that would be an offense to his memory as well as to you. For I am one of those who think that he erred more than once by word and deed in his public life; that some of the things he did might with profit have been differently done, and some of the things said differently said; and, again, that some of the things said and done might better have never been said or done at all. His own frankness over his mistakes is conclusive proof that he would have no one claim infallibility for him. He never committed what Carlyle regarded as the greatest of faults, to be conscious of none. Vehement of utterance, he was more than once answerable to the charge of inconsistency, though we are to remember Emerson's injunction that a foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds.

Nor was he, uniformly, the persuasive advocate, failing, on occasions, to understand that ideas become

acceptable and current according to the time, place and circumstance of their presentation. Not always the apostle of reconciliation, he promoted opposition to some of his proposals because of the uncompromising and unhappy method whereby they were urged. At times, too, it would seem as if he adopted but the means of expediency to further the end desired, thereby detracting, in no small measure, from his repute and influence. Yet this is to be said defensively of him, that when his motives were tried in the court of his own conscience, he considered that there was no justification for criticism, much less for rebuke. Nor, knowing of his abhorrence of self-deception, may we lightly disregard this personal vindication of himself.

Any thought of his shortcomings, however, should not be determinative or even too influential in our estimate of him whom we honor to-day. For we are to judge individuals not alone by what unwisely they have done or failed to do, but by a knowledge of the extent to which the credits predominate over the debits, when the balance sheet of their accomplishment in life is made up for posterity.

Burns puts much of the true philosophy of reasonableness into the lines:

*What's done we partly may compute
But know not what's resisted.*

Or, perhaps you would prefer to think of the unwisdom of Theodore Roosevelt, as sharing the same

gracious destiny accorded by Sterne to the oath of Uncle Toby:

“The avenging spirit which flew up to Heaven’s Chancery with the oath, blushed as he gave it in; and the recording Angel, as he wrote it down, dropped a tear upon the word and blotted it out forever.”

IN FACT, it will be a correct view if we realize that Theodore Roosevelt’s conceded greatness is, in no negligible manner, enhanced by the concession, that some of his utterances and acts were not unwarrantably the subject of censure. For when we appraise what he has left to us by way of word and deed, it must increasingly be realized that the American people have received from him, as from none other, the priceless legacy of an imperious summons to responsive citizenship.

Before referring, however, to the significance of this legacy, we may advantageously recall some of the distinguishing attributes of the man which made it possible for his life to be so appealingly rich in purpose and achievement.

Wholly without vanity, he had the rare virtue of candor which so often is a manifestation of distinction in character. He never wished to be canonized as “Sir Oracle.” Let me give you one or two illustrations of this trait in him.

When a candidate for the Governorship of the State of New York, he asked me to call at his headquarters, the old Fifth Avenue Hotel. On arrival there, I

learned that he wished to have my private secretary — a clever speaker and a Rough Rider — as one of his campaign orators. Of course, I assented, adding that inasmuch as the young man would probably go irrespective of my wishes, I might as well have the credit of letting him go. As we discussed this young man, Roosevelt inquired of me why, in view of his general ability, he had not made an independent success of life. After characterizing him as a rolling stone, I suggested that, inasmuch as it was the month of October when wise men went a-hunting, he might be classified as a rabbit dog. For a requested explanation of the epithet, I stated that now and then the most self-respecting game-bird dog, if a rabbit perchance had crossed the trail, would quit his professional job and forthwith go rabbit chasing. The comment, with the accompaniment of an engaging smile, was: "Well, I don't wish to consider that an insuperable defect in a man, for I'm a good deal of a rabbit dog myself."

Let me give you another instance of his candor, recounted to me by an Associate Justice of the Supreme Court of the United States. When Roosevelt came to Washington as Vice-President, he called several times at the home of the Judge, who, by reason of exacting Court work, had overlooked the fact until attention was called to it by one of his household. The next morning he visited the Vice-President to express his regret; but Roosevelt demurred to any apology, explaining that he had called on quite a selfish errand

— to get advice as to a course of law study. The Judge, attracted by the suggestion, said that he would not only gladly recommend the proper books, but that — inasmuch as he never wrote opinions on Saturday evenings — he would be pleased if Roosevelt would then come to his house and be quizzed concerning the intervening reading. Roosevelt expressed himself as “delighted.”

The summer came, McKinley was shot, and Roosevelt became the President of the United States. Naturally, nothing further was done concerning the project.

In the November following, the Judge was requested to come to the White House one evening. On arrival there, Roosevelt was found with only a few intimates discussing an outline of his proposed message to Congress. On learning of the occasion for the invitation, the Judge insisted that he ought not to be present, inasmuch as by some possibility, some of the things to be said in the message might be the subject of judicial consideration later. Roosevelt urged that, in view of the extreme unlikelihood of this, the Judge remain; and against his judgment he consented. As the discussion proceeded, the impression made upon the Judge was that, in some particulars, the message would savor of unwisdom, both as to subject-matter and form. And, notwithstanding the general commendation, the Judge, importuned by Roosevelt to express himself, spoke briefly but emphatically of his misgivings and thereupon went away.

The message when it reached Congress, was of the most temperate character, in some respects quite different from that outlined in the interview; and the Judge thought no more of the matter, concluding that upon reflection Roosevelt of his own motion had decided upon the modification. The Judge later had the misfortune, as he expressed it, to attend a reception at the White House, where a happening, which afterwards became more or less public, enabled him to tell me of this episode. When he entered the room, the President, in characteristically summary manner elbowed a way to him; and seizing the hand of the Judge, and shaking it almost out of its socket, he waved his disengaged hand to those present and said something after this fashion: "Let me introduce you, not to one of the great Judges of the world but to a great man, who, when he knew of views in my proposed message to Congress, had the courage to prevent me from making what might have been a critical mistake."

The Judge's comment was, that few persons in such high official position would have felt at liberty to be equally candid; not only because of vanity but of solicitude lest the declaration might affect injuriously the prestige of the Chief Magistrate of the Nation.

He had no fear of gathering about him great men or of awarding praise where it was due. In fact, he had no fear upon any subject. It may be said of him as Mr. Root said of Mr. Choate:

"He was wholly free of any impediment of timid-

idea, in the face of superciliousness, disparagement or even ruthless criticism. With the indomitable spirit of martyr and zealot, he undertook, so far as lay in his power, to see to it that neither arrogant wealth nor privilege should forget merit to pass unchallenged through the door of opportunity. And his denunciation of the narrowness and selfishness of business and political life, calls to mind the rallying words of Samuel J. Tilden, in his attack on the corruption in high places: "I will lead where any one shall dare to follow, and I will follow where any one shall dare to lead."

He kept company with ~~tricks~~ ~~trick~~ and the other thing and person, with the clown who ~~trickled~~ ~~trickled~~ with his fists, with the statesman, the politician, the scientist, the man of letters, and ~~trickled~~ ~~trickled~~ them always on terms of equality. There was one, however, with whom he never kept company — the professional altruist, and among the things with which he never kept company were sham, hypocrisy, and pretense, in any of their forbidding and sinister forms. His walk was never a strut.

That he was the staunch enemy of physical, mental and spiritual slothfulness in life many of his utterances testify.

"I wish to preach, not the doctrine of ignoble ease, but the doctrine of the strenuous life, the life of toil and effort, of labor and strife; to preach that highest form of success which comes, not to the man who desires mere easy peace, but to the man who does not shrink from danger, from hardships, or from

tem of social philosophy, and as such interpretation is fundamental, they give direction to all law making. The decisions of the courts on economic and social questions depend upon their economic and social philosophy, and for the peaceful progress of our people during the twentieth century we shall owe most to those judges who built a twentieth-century economic and social philosophy and not to a long-outgrown philosophy, which was itself the product of primitive economic conditions."

It is not strange, therefore, that Judge Cardozo says Roosevelt's intuitions and perceptions were deep and brilliant, "for that we felt."

"What am I to do, when I go on my knees outward, the rush and sweep of the universe is my personality should deflect them away from me?"

"Why should the great light of truth be broken up and impregnated with the dust of my element or my being? Such doubt and questions beset me now and again. The truth is, however, that all these inward questionings are born of the hope and the desire to transcend the limitations which beset all human nature. Roosevelt, we know now, had no illusions on this score. He was not pursuing an ideal. He was not fixing a goal. He was measuring the powers and endurance of those by whom the race is to be run."

It would be at least superfluous for one to add anything by way of emphasis to this illuminating tribute.

expressed himself naturally. His versatility was matched only by his fixity and persistence of purpose; and while filling out the term of McKenley, there was little or no doubt that he would be chosen as the candidate of his party at the approaching Republican National Convention.

LET me now, after this brief reference to a part of his equipment for the delivery of his arresting message, consider its character and mighty import to the American people.

Upon his election as President of the United States — whereby his words and deeds which had been the subject of criticism, were confronted through an overwhelming popular endorsement — he came to consider himself the representative not of a party but of a whole people. And he continued until the end of his days, in high and low places, by language that was often abrupt and partaking little of conventionality — to preach not merely a vibrant Americanism, but the admonishing gospel that we, in our day and generation, were steadily ignoring or even repudiating the compelling obligation we owe to our neighbor and the State, and so were inviting for ourselves retribution of the gods. He did not arrogate to himself the discovery of this obligation, but it can be justly claimed that he uncovered it, and though he gathered inspiration from the worthy men of our land and of other lands with whom such a conception was creed and

in unambiguous terms, our besetting ailments, to the end that we might understand how restoration to civic health depended upon conformity to the general counsels of wisdom. In full sympathy with Brown- ing's "All's right with the world," he held steadfast to the thought that all will be right with the world, only if the principle upon which that order must be reestablished was through the corrective influence of love of country. We were to call a halt in our so-called progress because we had lost the true path, and upon returning to the abandoned ways, must resume the march with such new impulse and new resolve, as would render, at least, not invite a repetition of our error.

He never indulged himself in regrets or vain regrets. By impassioned speech, in association with the saving grace of wit and humor, he manifested the exaltation of the work to which he was dedicated. He knew next to nothing of the foolish hope, if the flag nevertheless were upheld by stolid bearers who might not faint. And if his words betrayed no reconciliation with modern day apathy towards State duty, we must remember that he was not a Radical or Socialist, but regretted himself not only the leader of an assault against the fortified places where greed and insincerity together have entrenched, but as the herald of a new dawn of civic righteousness. Yet like the prophet of old he would say to us: "Keep the mountains, watch the way, make the lions strong, fortify the power mightily."

wherein brave deeds may be done. He made no journeyings to the land of Vanity Fair. At the bar of public opinion, he arraigned, as equal in guilt, affronting capital and labor traffickers with weaponed threats; and coupled together in ignominy, the Pharisaical creed of the Jew and the shiftness of the market place. He warned Jew and Hindu the Roman people, of dust-laden and unvisited paths of the gods, where irreverence had fastened its heels. He inveighed against the reckless havoc wrought to the State's opportunity by greedy and unscrupulous promoters of even gleanings there be done to the industry and the State. He exalted the nation's honor for the brave deeds of its valiant imp it was vain to state that the nation in the words of the Apostle, played the woman, for the nation was not the Lord and would not kneel. Just as he would. His conception of service to the State was not of a day, and his private life was unsullied by the taint of scandal. He never counted the cost of warfare with unweariness, and, when the call came, he looked unflinching into the face of Death as his only conqueror.

He was a man of the world, the age, the voyage of life.

Slaves were brought it was given to him, as Matthew Arnold said, but he had been given to a genius of Letters, to command that he sleep.

Under the name of Roosevelt.

nation — destined, perhaps, to express the final judgment of mankind as to the experiment of a democracy.

Humers in, grumbler though he was, voices these misgivings as he contemplates the future. "The spread eagle must fold his foolish wings and be less of a peacock." And then he adds:

"In the activity, with our practical understanding there is, at present, a great sensualism, a headlong devotion to work and to the conquest of a continent — to each man as large a share of the same as he can carve for himself — an extravagant confidence in our talent and activity, which becomes, when successful, a scornful materialism, but with the talent, of course, that it has no terror, no reserve, that it will fall back upon when it proves wrong."

Matthew Arnold, speaking with the authority of a thoughtful observer, identifies this, at *Amory*, one of his American addresses, by whom he wished to be remembered more than by any of his own prose productions — says:

"And the philosophers and the prophets, whom I at least have disposed to believe, and who say that moral law is given to states, and the falling of states, will tell us that the failure to mend whatsoever things are elevated must impair with an inexorable fatality the life of a nation, just as the failure to mend what's ever things are just, or what's ever things are amiable, or what's ever things are pure, will impair it, and that if the failure to mend what's ever things are elevated should be real in your American

more blameworthy by reason of their advantages of birth and station. Born and reared within the confines of the Republic, they have expatriated themselves in the land of Devil Cared in. They know next to nothing of the exalting music of the Union, to which they might keep valiant, rhythmic step, but seem content with the servitude of degrading jazz. Moreover, in that land of Devil Cared in prevails a loathsome disease—the contagious itch for notoriety and vulgarity—which is continually corrupting the public well-being. Not a few of them have contracted the disease, and the best to be said of the group among them is, that they are afflicted with what Wells terms State blindness.

In between these two extremes populated by The Many, dwell those appreciative of the gravity of the situation, who would strenuously insist on their capacity to be fit guardians of the integrity of our institutions. Yet we cannot arrogate to ourselves credit for such virtue except by setting an example which should persuade these others of their remissness and dereliction. Nor, to this end, must we ever forget that individualism, laudable as it is, depends for its vindication upon our taking counsel together of revealed wisdom as well as of tradition. One supreme virtue Theodore Roosevelt would inculcate in us, was that of cooperation as well as reconstruction to ideals was imperatively required of us, and that recompense to the worthiest purpose and utterance and conduct must necessarily be meagre, unless the hands of our endeavor are joined

in the grip of a common interest. And if our thought be that even such endeavor would be unavailing, we have but to remind ourselves how, again and again, history has been at pains to record for us the reassuring precedent to the contrary. For always to the prudent few, when aroused and disciplined, we can confidently appeal for deliverance from error. Let us, as illustrative of this thought, recall that quickening Bible story of the twice-sifted army of Gideon.

Over against Gideon and his army was the host of the Midianites; and he was not even confident of the issue of the coming battle. He asked, therefore, for this sign from the Lord: that if in the evening he spread out a fleece of wool, in the morning the earth about the fleece should be dry and the fleece of wool wet with dew. The sign was given him, and the story says that the next morning he "wringed the dew out of the fleece, a bowl full of water." Yet he wished further to be reassured, and for the next morning he asked that the fleece which he was again to spread out should be dry and the earth about it wet. Again it was as he had asked, and now he was prepared to lead the attack; but the Lord said that the army must first be sifted so as to know of its courage. Therefore He told Gideon to offer to all those that were "fearful or afraid" the choice to depart, and more than a score of thousands went their way. Once more Gideon was ready to give battle, but the Lord required now that the army be sifted again to learn of its prudence. Ac-

cordingly he was directed to take those that remained to the water, and try them there by the manner of their drinking; and all those who bowed upon their knees to the water, thoughtless of the danger before them, were to be put aside, and only those who caught the water in their hands and lapped of it, as "a dog lappeth of water," with eyes to the front and on the foe, were to be chosen to answer to the roll-call. Then though but three hundred remained, these tried men went forth and prevailed.

STILL another menacing condition confronting us is our indifference to a salutary public opinion, proceeding almost wholly from a flouting of civic responsibility. I am not speaking of public opinion as to the approaching election, as to whether we are to have more snow this winter than we had last winter, or as to the probable winner of the next prize fight. I have in mind that public opinion, to which the Courts are attaching a determining importance in the construction of statutes enacted by State legislatures. I have not the time to refer in detail to this, nor would you, perhaps, have the inclination to listen to me. Let me, nevertheless, at least say to you, that the Supreme Court of the United States has held that a State legislature, if it acts in good faith, which can scarcely ever be impugned, can enact into a so-called Emergency Statute that which it conceives — to quote the somewhat undeterminative phraseology of the Court itself — "is sanctioned by usage, or held by the pre-

"We do not know what public opinion really is or who really supports it. It is so uninformed and disorganized, so lacking in real leadership, so unsupported by disciplined thought that almost any well-conducted propaganda can seize upon it and temporarily control it for almost any end."

Says Mr. H. W. Nevins in his *Farwell to America*:

"Good bye to the wealthy plutocrat who has wisdom's fire to give light to the good, yet to the idle audiences that lap up the light and scatter it. Good bye to politicians contenting themselves to peddle their principles. Good bye to Republicans and Democrats, distinguished only by natural talents. Good bye to the United States. I would not exchange it for us and Reichs, snowed out where Mr. Gompers is called a Socialist, and Mr. A. J. Muste would soon be banished. A land too large to be content with greatness, a land where wealth beyond the dreams of British profiteers dwells, dress, dress, and dress, and luxury, crass and unshamed. A land where the politics violently divergent, a land where even Catholics cannot coal-scape where mothers look up on the infant disorder, and the plurally civilized, the most savage breast, a land where the personal freedom and integrity with rage for justice, a land where wealth is taxed out of sight, or for very shame strives to hide its luxury, a land where an ancient order is passing away, and leaders who by all means are hailed by Lord

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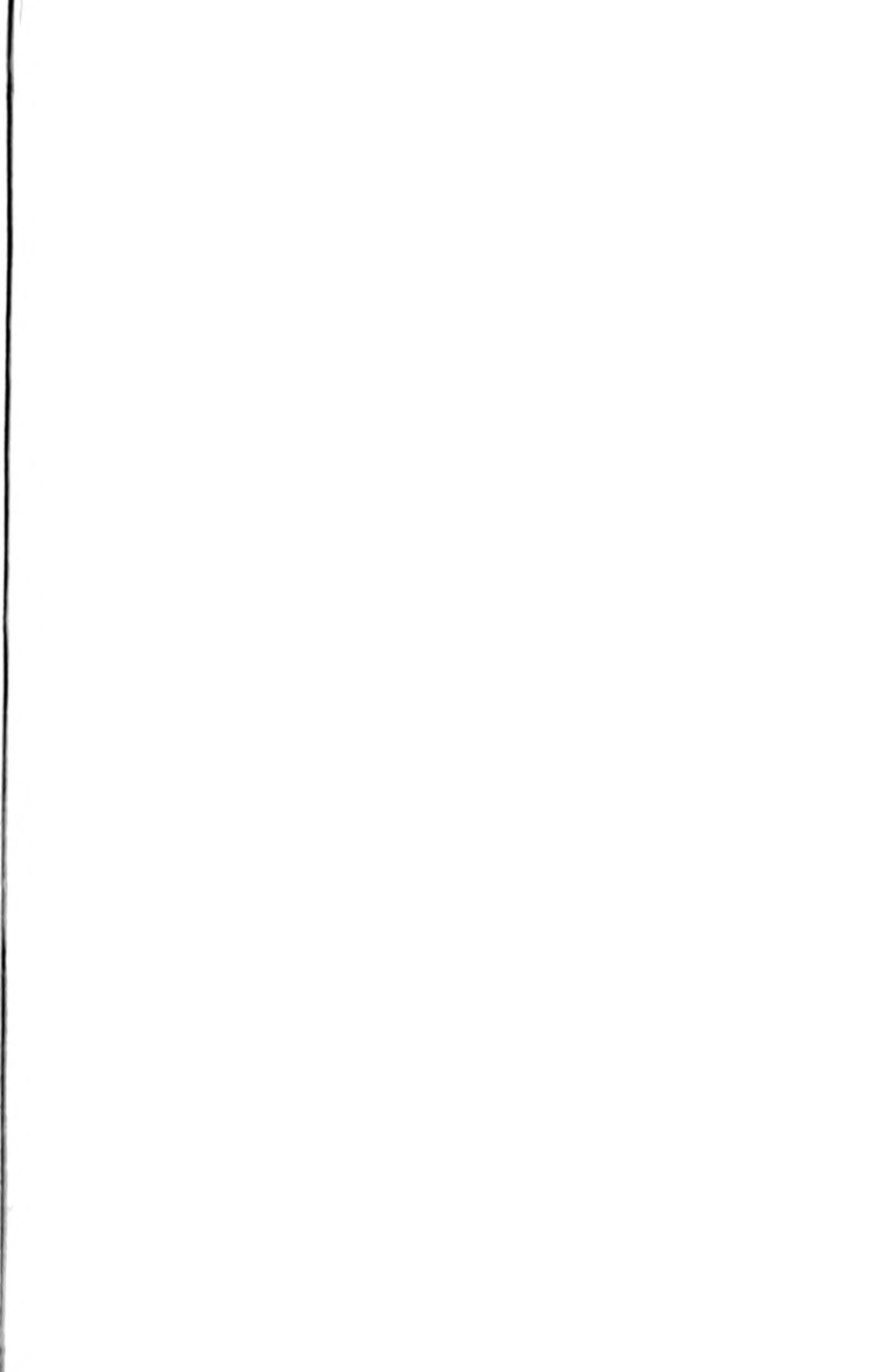
indictment of our rhetorical patriotism. We seem at times of the nation that prating of our political virtues is proof of their existence, whereas, on the contrary, it is often relevant testimony tending to establish the falsity of any such claim. And, to understand how permanent might be the memory of Theodore Roosevelt, we must not realize that every line of the relations of our people to the great event, is related to the great event, and thus, embracing, regardless of time passing.

IF THEN, we are to do justice to our dead, we must have some standard by which the claim of authority is to be judged. And, if we do, we must not let us be deceived by the fact that we do not still have completely equal and harmless differences of noble and virtuous opinions, whose names are a synonym for duty to the State, and none of them, as I have said, represent an approach in the respect to what Roosevelt represents in popular esteem, or could all that is said of popularly as he.

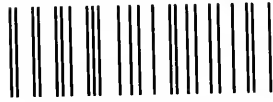
It is good to see Mr. Coates, and Dean Treder, and my fellow countrymen, and to see how all gatherings where the word is put out of Theodore Roosevelt are, and are, inspired by his spiritual presence. Do not let us mistake that it is here with us this evening. And as illustrative of my thought concerning the rightful occupancy of that chair, let me recall to you some lines from Longfellow, who,

the time for reorientation came, the Anxious Seat was set aside for those who had evinced a desire to seek the so-called salvation of the forthright orthodoxy of yesterday. What we need today, however, is to sit in a new Anxious Seat, for the purpose of embracing that political salvation of which Theodore Roosevelt was proved to be the nobly unmissable exponent. And that new, though unimagined, with his chief aim to make the Republic, learn by heart, in more than one way, the compelling laws of *Maintenance of Morality*, which were the foundation of the governing principle of the State, and which will be interpreted by no other than the author.

I SAID a few moments ago that Theodore Roosevelt sleeps under the wings of R. O. W., and he will continue to sleep there, irrespective of what we may do or fail to do in the future. Another further thought occurs to me. Although many of the old beliefs have, with time, fallen away from us, one survives, even among men of science as well as the poets and



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